

Foreword

This issue of the *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* is the second of two issues compiling the results of the “Africa-Asia University Dialogue for Basic Education Development” (“A-A Dialogue”) project. The “A-A Dialogue” project is a joint research endeavor by African and Asian universities to contribute to achieving the international commitment of “Education for All” (EFA). This project was implemented from 2004 to 2007 in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations University (UNU), and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) with the Center for the Study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE), Hiroshima University functioning as the secretariat.

The primary regional focus of the project was placed on sub-Saharan Africa, because as indicated in the EFA Monitoring Reports in 2002 and 2007, while this region has made some progress, it still needs far more effort to achieve EFA goals. At the same time this project was based on the reflection that while international cooperation in education has long been focused on basic education, universities, particularly those in Africa, seem to have limited say in the development of the education sector in general and basic education in particular. The basic idea of the project therefore was that as the apex of research and knowledge, universities should play a crucial role in influencing change and development of basic education through identifying the real and important EFA issues and researching them, thus becoming able to suggest possible solutions.

This project also reflected the philosophy of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) which emphasizes a more self-reliant approach and effort by and for African countries. In the context of this project, the self-reliant approach means on the one hand, the project was expected to provide useful research results so that African countries can take a self-reliant approach to tackle challenges in education, while on the other hand it was intended that African universities would take initiative in designing and implementing their research, as well as in analyzing and reporting the results. In other words, research themes should be identified by the local researchers of the country where educational challenges exist, and the research itself should be conducted by them. Unlike many cases that have occurred with African universities, this is neither research commissioned by international organizations or donors nor research assistance for researchers from the North.

Another important feature of this project is dialogue between African and Asian universities. This was meant to promote experience-sharing and peer-learning between them. It was expected that Asian experiences in basic education development and the role played by universities in it might be useful for Africa, particularly in terms of a self-reliant approach.

As to the activities organized under this project, there were three components as follows:

(1) Study mission to Asia for African university-based education experts with officials from the central education administration

Each year during the project period, a group of African university-based experts and officials from the central education administration who are determined to take the self-reliant approach to educational development were invited to undertake a month-long study mission to Asia for the purpose of jointly developing a more self-reliant policy perspective for basic education development. The group first joined a program organized by a university in Asia other than Japan to exchange views and experiences in educational development with each other, and to observe Asian practices in education. Following the country visit, the group went to Japan for concentrated work to develop a joint-policy-oriented research framework in basic education and to prepare a work plan for project implementation at the country level. In this mission, dialogue and experience-sharing were highly emphasized. Three groups, each of which was composed of four countries (for a total of twelve), were hosted by the University of Educational Planning and Administration, India, Indonesia University of Education, and Chiang Mai University, Thailand from 2005 to 2007 respectively, and in Japan, CICE was host to the groups for the entire period.

(2) National-level research in Africa

Upon return to their respective countries, the participants in the study mission organized seminars to share the results of the mission with their colleagues, policy-makers, educational administrators, and teachers. This seminar was at the same time used as an opportunity to prepare for the implementation of the research. They then conducted the national-level research and other activities agreed upon by the country team. The tentative findings of the research were discussed by the team at the end of each year and a final research report was prepared by the end of the project. Researchers of Asian universities including those in Japan joined the research as collaborators.

(3) Reflective dialogue meetings

Reflective dialogue meetings were organized in order to share the results of the research among themselves and with other researchers, as well as policy-makers, educational administrators, and teachers. Some of the Asian experts who have collaborated in the project were also invited to enrich the dialogue at the meetings. This meeting took place three times, in February-March 2006 at CICE, Hiroshima, in November 2007 at Makerere University, Uganda, and in December 2007 at UNESCO, Paris.

Through the project, twelve research reports have come out from African teams. Their research themes can roughly be classified into four categories; (1) quality of education at the school/classroom level (five reports), (2) factors affecting quality of education (three), (3) professional development of teachers and quality of education (three), and (4) education for vulnerable children. A number of papers have also been produced by African and Japanese collaborative teams. The two special issues of the journal including

this one have carried twelve papers altogether from African teams and two from joint teams. I do hope that these papers reflect the real issues and challenges faced by basic education in Africa and will be an initial attempt toward more positive contributions by African universities to basic education development.

Finally the following is the list of participating universities in the project.

Africa

University of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), Bahir Dar University (Ethiopia), University of Cape Coast (Ghana), University of Education Winneba (Ghana), Kenyatta University (Kenya), University of Antananarivo (Madagascar), University of Malawi (Malawi), Abdou Moumouni University (Niger), University of Lagos (Nigeria), Bayero University (Nigeria), University of Pretoria (South Africa), University of Dar es Salam (Tanzania), Mzumbe University (Tanzania), Makerere University (Uganda), Kyambogo University (Uganda), University of Zambia (Zambia)

Asia

National University of Educational Planning and Administration (India), Indonesia University of Education (Indonesia), Hiroshima University (Japan), Kobe University (Japan), Nagoya University (Japan), Naruto University of Education (Japan), Osaka University (Japan), Tokyo Gakugei University (Japan), Waseda University (Japan), Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia), Chiang Mai University (Thailand), Vietnam National University, Hanoi (Vietnam)

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